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ABSTRACT

Questionnaires surveying the extent of programs and support for education of the gifted and talented were received from 60 teachers and administrators in rural elementary and secondary schools in Nebraska's 11 most western counties. (The return rate of the mailed questionnaires was 24%). Results indicated that teachers and administrators overwhelmingly supported the idea of gifted/talented education, believed their schools were not satisfactorily meeting needs of gifted and talented students, and valued the idea of state funding, programs, and professional education to meet these needs. Program activity received little financial incentive from the state, varied widely among schools, and was far less than sentiment suggested. Gifted/talented education was most disappointing in smaller schools; larger districts and schools with less staff turnover were more involved in gifted/talented programs. Listing barriers to gifted/talented curriculum development (such as lack of time, facilities, funding, and staff and training), teachers wanted more professional training and were sensitive to needs of gifted/talented students, but underutilized existing resources such as the state Office for Gifted/Talented Education. Tables provide responses to the questionnaire and paraphrases of respondents' questions to the state gifted/talented program supervisor. The 21-item true-false questionnaire forms the appendix. (LFL)

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Abstract

A Survey of Gifted/Talented Education in Rural Nebraska: A First Appraisal

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This project surveyed teachers in Nebraska's eleven most western counties regarding gifted/talented (g/t) education in their schools. Results indicated that teachers and administrators are overwhelmingly supportive of the idea of g/t education. However, program activity, which varies tremendously between schools, is far less than educational sentiment suggests. G/t program activity is most disappointing in the smaller schools. Teachers are aware of barriers in g/t curriculum development, want more professional training, are sensitive to g/t student needs,

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A Survey of Gifted/Talented Education in Rural Nebraska: A First Appraisal

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School districts vary in their commitment to gifted/talented students. Some states, like Kansas, mandate programs. Most others, like Nebraska, philosophically support gifted/talented (g/t) education and do provide guidelines (see State Department of Education, 1976). However, Nebraska provides little financial incentive for g/t (gifted/talented) programming. Consequently, a Nebraska public school can decide not to have g/t education.

Consequently, what is done in Nebraksa reflects the initiative of sensitive teachers, foresightful administrators, and concerned parents. Some districts do much; others do nothing. What does exist is a credit to personal resourcefulness and determination.

Currently, there are about 1,000 public school districts in Nebraska. Nebraska's Department of Education (undated) surveyed their districts during the 1982-83 school year. Results indicated that 271 of them provided programmatically for their gifted/talented students. (Note that 78% of the state's entire 1982-83 enrollment was educated in these districts.) Of these 271, 151 school districts responded to a subsequent detailed survey. A majority of these 151 districts used classroom enrichment

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and/or independent study as their primary g/t curricular strategy. In the 1982-83 survey, only about 25% of Nebraska's school districts did "something" for g/t education.

The purpose of the present questionnaire was to assess the level of activity and educational concern toward gifted/talented students and program development in Nebraska's most western eleven counties.

It was hypothesized, first, that larger schools and larger districts are more actively involved in gifted/talented programming. Second, less experienced teachers will be more interested in g/t education.

Method

Procedure.--In early September, 1984, 259 paper-and-pencil survey questionnaires were mailed to public and private schools located in Nebraska's eleven Panhandle counties (e.g., Banner, Box Butte, Cheyenne, Dawes, Deuel, Garden, Kimball, Morrill, Scottsbluff, Sheridan, and Sioux). These counties contain Class 1, 2, 3, and 6 schools (see Lutjeharms & Vontz, undated)[1].

From the original mailing, the Post Office did not deliver 51 questionnaires because of insufficient addresses. A re-mailing of these 51 was done on October 3, 1984.

Questionnaire recipients were selected randomly from a listing of teachers and districts (Lutjeharms & Vontz,

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undated). One teacher from Class I schools and two teachers from the remaining schools were mailed questionnaires.

Questionnaire.--Recipients received a cover letter describing the purpose of the survey plus the five page questionnaire.

The questionnaire's five sections requested and/or provided:

I. Biographic data, e.g., information about gender, age, years in current position, total years of teaching experience, etc.;

II. School data;

III. G/t program and teaching barriers;

IV. Twenty one (21) statements sampling experience, attitudes, and preparation for teaching the gifted and talented;

V. An opportunity to write three questions to Sheila Brown. Dr. Brown is currently Nebraska's Supervisor for Gifted/Talented Programs.

Sections I, II, III, and V permitted free-response data. Section IV requested true-false responses.

Results[2]

Sixty completed questionnaires (24%) were returned.

Educators.--Of the 60 who returned the questionnaire, 47 (78%) were female and 13 (22%) were male.

Respondants ranged in ages from their early twenties to over 60. The modal age bracket (n = 12) was 30-34 years.

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Eleven (11) were between the ages of 40-44, and eleven (11) others were 45-49. Twelve (n = 12) were fifty years or older.

Confounded with chronolgical age is total years of teaching experience and years in the current teaching assignment. Among the respondants were first year novices to well- seasoned professionals. The mean total years of teaching experience was 13.9 (n = 60; sd = 9.1; range = 1 - 40 years). The average number of years in their current position was 7.9 (n = 60; sd = 5.7; range = 1 - 20 years). See Table 1.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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Schools.--Of these, 16 were from Class I schools; one (1) was a Class II school; thirty-seven (37) were from Class III schools; and five (5) were from Class VI schools. One (1) questionnaire was returned from private schools; 58 came from public schools.

Schools varied tremendously in size, from 2 students to 600 (sd = 148.7). The mean school (n=60) population was 212.4.

School enrollment was correlated with three variables. First, age brackets were assigned ordinal rank, and, using a point biserial correlation, age-rank was correlated with school size. This correlation was not significant. Second,

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however, years in the current teaching position did correlate significantly with school size (r (df=58) = .36, p < .05). Third, total years of teaching experience did not correlate significantly with school size.

Of the 60 teachers who responded, thirty-four (34) came from elementary schools, four (4) from middle schools/junior high schools, eleven (11) from high schools, and eleven (11) from combined (K-12) buildings.

Barriers.--Responses describing teaching and programmatic barriers catalogued practical reasons why it is difficult to launch a special program for gifted and talented students. Teachers face many frustrations like scheduling, scarce resources, and g/t student identification. See Table 2.

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T-F item-by-item appraisal.--The remaining analyses of results will focus on Class I (n = 16) and Class III (n = 37) schools and teachers. By state designation, all Class I schools are elementary. Of the Class III schools, 18 were elementary; five were secondary; three were junior high; and 11 were K-12 buildings.

A cursory, item-by-item inspection of results is informative. A listing of T-F questions (see Appendix A) and the summary data (see Table 3) are provided. The following

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general interpretations are offered:

Statement (S) 1: Slightly more than one third of the teachers have had formal college training in g/t education.

S 2: Teachers overwhelmingly view their administrators as supportive of g/t education.

S 3: About 28% of the schools have g/t programs or provisions.

S 4: There was a divergence of opinion on how best to identify g/t students. About 38% supported cognitive-intellectual definitions.

S 5: Overwhelmingly, teachers felt that the needs of their g/t students were <u>not</u> being educationally satisfied.

S 6: Almost all teachers supported curricular enrichment.

S 7: About 78% of the teachers felt frustrated by the lack of state finanacial support for g/t education.

S 8: Very few of the teachers had directly contacted Dr. Sheila Brown, the State Supervisor for Gifted/Talented Programs.

S 9: Most teachers are interested in obtaining formal training in educating the g/t student.

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S 10: About 90% of the teachers wish to learn how to obtain state funds to support their g/t efforts.

S 11: 84% felt that g/t students need special encouragement; otherwise, g/t students may not succeed on their own.

S 12: Four-fifths of the teachers felt that their teacher-colleagues supported g/t education.

S 13: Forty (40%) percent of the teachers are involved in schools that are actively planning for g/t programming.

S 14: Very few of the teachers had personally applied to the State for funds.

S 15: About one-third of the teachers are interested in obtaining an endorsement in g/t education.

S 16: Again on training, 85% are interested in attending a brief workshop on g/t education.

S 17: Almost all of the respondants deal with the gifted as an adjunct responsibility. Only 4% were hired specifically as teachers of the gifted.

S 18: 23% of the schools had received funds to support g/t education.

S 19: 84% of the respondants supported acceleration programs for the gifted. Note that these teachers supported both enrichment (D 6) and acceleration. Sometimes, these two curricular strategies are seen as opposites.

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S 20: As opposed to questions 6 and 19, only about one-fourth of the teachers wish to separate g/t students educationally from their regular classrooms. Consequently, exclusive grouping would be more difficult than enrichment or acceleration to implement educationally.

S 21: Slightly more than one-fourth of the schools have g/t coordinators or special teachers.

Class I vs. Class III.--Class I and III teachers differed significantly on the number of years in their current school assignment (t (df = 51) = -2.42, $p < .05$). On the average, Class I teachers had been in their current positions for 5 years, while Class III teachers were in their current posts for 9.09 years. However, the mean total years of teaching service did not differ significantly between Class I (12.37 yrs.) and Class III (14.43 yrs).

Using a Chi Square test at the 10% level of significance, results indicated that teachers from Class I and Class III districts responded unexpectedly on statements 13, 16, and 21.

Statement 13 concerned school activity: "Teachers and administrators in my school are actively discussing, or even planning, for the development of a gifted/talented program." More schools are not actively engage than are (total chi square (df=1) = 2.72, $p < .10$). Class III school districts

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(47%) are more actively engaged than Class I districts (21%).

Statement 16: "I am interested in attending a workshop . . . on gifted/talented education if one were conveniently scheduled." An overwhelming 85% of the teachers were interested in a gifted/talented workshop (total chi square (df=1) = 4.07, $p < .10$). In fact, 100% of the Class I teachers and 78% of the Class III teachers answered true.

Statement 21 assessed the availability of gifted/talented resource teachers and program coordinators. Overall, 71% of the respondents reported that g/t personnel were not available (total chi square (df=1) = 3.21, $p < .10$). However, g/t resource personnel were more available in Class III (37%) than Class I schools (12.5%).

Class I elementary vs. Class III elementary.--Looking at true-false response patterns in only elementary school teachers may be the most focused and appropriate comparison between these district classifications. Class I and III districts share elementary schools in common.

Limiting the analysis to only Class I and III elementary schools, results indicated that observed T-F response patterns were significantly different from expected patterns on statements 3 (total chi square (df= 1) = 2.59, $p > .10$) and, as before, 13, 16, and 21.

Statement 3: "My school currently has a program for gifted and talented students." Only 20% of the District I

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elementary schools while 47% of the District III elementary schools have g/t programs.

Years of experience.--It was hypothesized that years in service are associated with changing attitudes. Experienced and inexperienced teachers may see their educational worlds differently, and this may be reflected in their perceptions and expectations about g/t students.

The 53 Class I and III teachers were divided into three categories by length of teaching experience: 1-5 years; 6-14 years; and 15 or more years. A chi square test at the 10% level of significance was performed on each of the 21 true-false statements. Except for two questions, the true-false response patterns were as expected for the three experience categories.

The fourth T-F statement reads: "Almost all gifted students can be identified through measures of intellectual and academic achievements." Experience related marginally with this identification attitude (total chi square (df=2) = 4.68, $p < .10$). About 52% of the 21 teachers with 6-14 years experience agreed with the statement while only 35% of the 20 most experienced teachers and 11% of the nine least experienced teachers found the statement acceptable. Moderately experienced teachers covet cognitive definitions of giftedness.

Statement 18 assessed the distribution of state funding by years experience: "I, or my school, has received funds

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from Nebraska's Department of Education to support a gifted education program." Over 77% of the districts had not received any funding (total chi square (df=2) = 6.17, p < .10). The association between experience and support suggested a curvilinear relationship. None of the least experienced teachers had received support. However, 70% of the state funds that had been granted were awarded to the moderately experienced. Of teachers with 6-14 years experience, 41% had received support.

Because of funding activities, teachers with 6-14 years of intermediate experience were the most involved. It is worth noting that Rule III (Nebraska Department of Education, 1976), Nebraska's state guidelines, defines giftedness with predominantly cognitive (i.e., achievement, tested intelligence) criteria. Apparently, moderately experienced teachers had internalized Rule III, perhaps through their working associations with the state (see Statement 18).

Size of schools, Class I and Class III.--The total group of Class I and III district schools were subcategorized three ways: (1) 1 to 53 children; (2) 54-207; (3) 208 and higher. The average size of Class I school was 72.3; the mean size of Class III schools was 276.7. The grand mean was 207.2. Size could be related to programmatic activity and teacher attitudes. Significant

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chi square values were obtained for response patterns in Statements 2, 13, and 21.

Statement 2 concerned administrative support for g/t programs. About 80% of the teachers thought that their administrators were supportive (total chi square (df=2) = 5.77, $p < .10$). Support was stronger in the smallest (100%) and largest (83%) schools. Only 58% of the intermediate sized schools reported administrative support.

Only 40% of the teachers reported active school planning (total chi sqaure (df=2) = 6.00, $p < .10$). The largest schools were decidedly the most active (57%).

Resources are not readily available. Only 27% of the teachers had access to a g/t teacher or coordinator (total chi square (df=2) = 5.33, $p < .10$). No small schools and only about one third of the intermediate and large schools have g/t resource personnel available.

Questions for Dr. Sheila Brown.--The sixty respondants, when provided an opportunity in the questionnaire's concluding section, generated 45 questions/concerns for Nebraska's Supervisor of Gifted/Talented Education (see Table 4). This list was

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Insert Table 4 about here

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diverse. Nonetheless, the most common concerns were those of identification, financial and emotional support, long term effects of g/t programs, and curricular options.

Discussion and Conclusion

Results suggest that larger schools and school districts (i.e., Class III) are more involved in g/t education. Apparently, the common barriers of time, money, facilities, etc., are less apparent in larger, and perhaps more totally affluent, disticts. Class III disticts, for example, had more g/t resource personnel available than Class I schools.

It is simplistic just to be satisfied with this obvious analyses. Class I and III schools differ in many ways other than enrollment. Data in this survey suggests a more refined interpretation.

Total years in current teaching positions correlated significantly with total school size. Furthermore, teachers in larger, Class III districts stayed nearly twice as long in their positions as Class I teachers. Shorter mean tenure means faster average staff turnover. Staff turnover disrupts program development and mitigates against quality g/t curricula. Some believe that it takes five, fully dedicated years to move a new g/t program from nothing to respectable operation. If the present data accurately reflects turnover, the only major encumbrance in Class I schools is not financial stringency.

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The relationship between years of experience and attitudes toward g/t education was equivocal. Almost all teachers felt that their schools were not satisfactorily meeting g/t student needs. However, slightly more of the most experienced teachers (19%) than the least experienced teachers (11%) felt that g/t students could make it on their own without special programs.

The idea of supporting g/t education through special state funding, programs, and professional training is valued by Nebraska's rural teachers. However, what is done educationally in this State's schools lags disappointingly behind sentiment.

Granted, the demands of limited teacher time, energy, and resources, especially in the smallest districts, are real barriers to g/t program development. However, so few teachers had contacted a major state resource--the State's Office for Gifted/Talented Education. This under-utilization of a State resource by local schools suggests, at least, unawareness. It also suggests the need for local districts to more aggressively pursue resources and an opportunity for this State Office to more effectively market its services.

Even from this small sample, it is overwhelmingly evident that teachers and their school administrators verbally support g/t education. However, words and philosophical sentiment, no matter how well-intentioned, are

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not programs. These teachers realized that something programmatically should be done, and, in a few precious cases, it was. In most cases, it was not.

Human talent in Nebraska's gifted/talented school children is as much a resource as its land, water, or rural heritage. A natural resource, as any Nebraska farmer or rancher knows, must be artfully cultivated and managed, or it is likely to be wasted.

Gifted and talented students across Nebraska are not uniformly managed by its schools. The potential waste of human talent is staggering.

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Nebraska Department of Education. Fact sheet 1: Statistics and facts about Nebraska's schools, 1982-83 school year. Lincoln, NE: Author, undated.

Nebraska Department of Education. Rule 3: Regulations for approved programs and criteria for the classification of gifted/talented students (revised). Lincoln, NE: Author, 1976.

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Footnote

[1]The State of Nebraska makes legal distinctions between districts (see Lutjeharms & Vontz, undated): Class 1: Districts maintaining only the elementary grades from kindergarten through the 8th grade. Class 2: Districts under 1,000 population, maintaining both elementary and secondary grades. Class 3: Districts of 1,000 to 100,000 population, maintaining both elementary and secondary grades. Class 4: Lincoln only . . . . Class 5: Omaha only . . . . Class 6: Districts maintaining secondary grades only.

[2]The author gratefully acknowledges the statistical assistance of Mr. James Kaus, Chadron State College, Chadron, NE 69337.

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Table 1

Mean Years Teaching Experience

School class	N	Years in current position	Total years in teaching
I	16	5.0	12.4
II	1	16.0	39.0
III	37	9.1	14.4
VI	5	7.4	9.4
Private	1	7.0	15.0
Grand	60	8.9	18.0

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Table 2

Barriers to Educating

Gifted/Talented Students

Barrier	Frequency[1,2]
Time, scheduling	54
Curriculum and facilities	45
Insufficient money	41
Staff and training	40
No support (e.g., from teachers, parents, students, administrators, community)	28
Program conflicts	11
Creating a challenge for gifted/talented students	9
Identification of the gifted	9
Gifted/talented student adjustment	5
Distance from resources	5
Designing programs for a small number of children	3
Other responses	11

[1]Responses were pooled from two free response items on the questionnaire. One item asked for programmatic barriers

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that schools face in establishing g/t programs, and the second asked for difficulties in teaching gifted students.

[2]Based on n = 60 questionnaires.

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Table 3

Percent True by Item and

Response Categorization

Question	Class			Yrs. Exper.				School size			
No.	I	III	T	5<	6/14	15+	T	53<	54-207	208+	T
1	50	33	38	44	29	45	38	44	50	26	36
2	86	76	79	86	80	76	79	100	58	83	80
3	20	31	28	22	30	28	28	10	18	34	25
4	40	37	38	11	52	35	38	40	50	35	40
5	7	6	6	0	6	9	6	9	0	9	7
6	93	97	96	89	100	95	96	92	100	95	96
7	73	80	78	78	80	77	78	64	92	73	76
8	12	8	9	0	5	17	9	17	8	9	11
9	93	80	84	89	95	72	84	100	82	73	82
10	87	91	90	88	89	91	90	90	92	90	91
11	7	19	16	11	15	19	16	10	8	23	16
12	87	76	79	71	84	77	79	91	73	81	81
13	21	47	40	12	45	45	40	22	18	57	40
14	7	19	15	0	18	20	15	0	10	20	11
15	29	33	32	25	35	32	32	18	30	39	32
16	100	78	85	89	86	83	85	92	83	78	83
17	6	3	4	0	10	0	4	0	0	9	4
18	15	27	23	0	41	16	23	0	30	32	23
19	93	81	84	100	86	75	84	100	73	82	84

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20	23	30	28	29	26	30	28	0	36	29	24
21	12	37	29	12	33	32	29	0	33	36	27

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Table 4

Questions/Concerns for Sheila Brown

Paraphrase of question/concern	F[1]
Best methods of identification	6
Obtaining funds	6
Is there any follow-up evaluation of g/t programs to determine their long-term effectiveness?	5
Can the needs of g/t students be met and can these students still remain in the regular classroom?	4
Initiating a program, e.g., in a small school	4
Benefits of out-of-class program vs. in-class	3
What programs are avialable?	3
Why so much money for remedial and special education students and so little for g/t?	3
How do you interest and involve parents?	2
Other responses	36

[1]Based on 60 returned questionnaires.

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Appendix A

Twenty One True-False Statements

No.	Statement
1.	I have taken a college course or workshop in gifted/talented education . . . .
2.	Most school administrators with whom I work are, in one way or another, supportive of gifted education.
3.	My school currently has a program for gifted and talented students.
4.	Almost all gifted students can be identified through measures of intellectual and academic achievements.
5.	The educational needs of gifted and talented students in my school are being fully met by our standard curriculum.
6.	It is important to have enrichment programs for gifted and talented students.
7.	Before my school could do much for our gifted/talented students, I feel that we would need to receive additonal funding from the State.
8.	I have contacted the Nebraska Department of Education's Programs for Gifted and Talented (Sheila Brown, Supervisor).

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9. I am interested in attending a course . . . in gifted/talented education if one were conveniently available.
10. I, or my school, would be very interested in learning how we may be eligible for state funds for gifted education.
11. It is not necessary to create "special" educational programs for the gifted and talented because they will succeed anyway.
12. Most teachers with whom I work are, in one way or another, supportive of gifted education.
13. Teachers and administrators in my school are actively discussing, or even planning, for the development of a gifted/talented program.
14. I, or my school, have submitted a request for funds for gifted education from Nebraska's Department of Education.
15. I am interested in obtaining a teacher education endorsement . . . in gifted/talented education if courses were conveniently offered . . . .
16. I am interested in attending a workshop (several hours for one day) on gifted/talented education if one were conveniently scheduled.
17. I have worked as a teacher hired primarily to instruct the gifted.

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18. I, or my school, has received funds from Nebraska's Department of Education to support a gifted education program.
19. It is important to have acceleration programs for gifted and talented students.
20. It is important to have exculsive-grouping programs (i.e., gifted students are separated from regular classes).
21. My school district currently employs a gifted-education resource teacher or coordinator.

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